



C&T'S Dispatch

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Friends of the
Cumbres & Toltec
Scenic Railroad
2002 Annual
Report included

The Camaraderie of Working on the Railroad

by Joseph Ferguson

I stood on the high school steps watching my classmates of four years disperse after the graduation ceremony. I knew some would work in their family business in the village that served the outlying farms. Some would continue farming the rolling dairy country of New York State. A fortunate few would leave in the fall to continue their education at college or university. None of this was possible for me. The following morning I left our farm and hitchhiked to New York City.

My first job was in one of the small towns north of the city on the bank of the Hudson River. I was told to report to the "cripple yard." Later I learned that, in railroad language, a cripple is a disabled car or one that has jumped the track. Its quick removal is crucial to keeping the trains moving.

The yard was a siding between the main line of the New York Central Railroad and NY Route 9, which follow the Hudson River north out New York City. A number of narrowly spaced tracks provided a parking place for passenger and freight cars in need of repair. Some of the cars were from other companies—the Erie, the Lackawanna, or the Santa Fe, names that had the lure of distant places. "Route of the Phoebe Snow," stenciled in large flowing letters on the side of freight cars evoked visions of geese flying over infinite prairie. This was the promise of travel and adventure I had dreamed of as I plodded through endless farm chores.

A drab building housed the manager's office and locker room. From an indifferent clerk, a few years my senior, I received a social security number, a membership card in the Brotherhood of Railwaymen's Union, and a pass that gave me limited free travel by rail. I was assigned to a crew of two other laborers. An eight-hour day seemed trifling to the burden of work never finished on the farm. Leisure time and generous wages allowed me to pursue a frivolous adolescence, long postponed.

A work force of roughly 25 men was divided into laborers, helpers, mechanics, and engineers. The union was powerful and contentious. I was cautioned to do only what I was told to do and not to finish a job too quickly—"killing the job." The tactic was to create or prolong work. The men were

no fools, when the work was done they would be laid off.

I was startled one day to hear repeated sharp reports, like shots in the distance. Jake explained that it was a locomotive engineer making his retirement run on the loop. The loop permitted turning the engine around. Torpedoes, explosive signal devices, were strapped to the track at close intervals to give a dramatic fusillade to the engineer's final locomotive ride.

We envied the engineers and mechanics when the steam crane was sent out on to the main track to rescue a disabled car. They were on call after hours, on weekends or holidays, and their discomfort was generously paid for at rates of time-and-a-half or double time. The right to overtime was jealously guarded, laborers and helpers rarely went along.



Volunteers from Session D gather in the Chama railyard, June 2002. There were no operations on the railroad at the time because of the government mandated closure, but the volunteers went ahead on their historic preservation projects. (Photo by Tom Cardin.)

C&TS Dispatch

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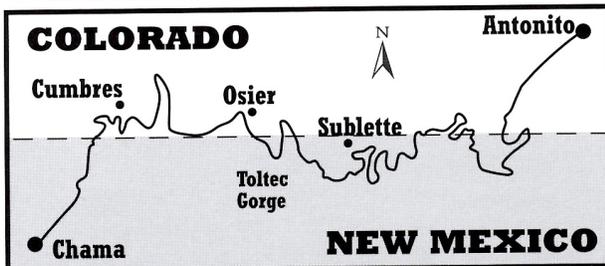
Please write the editor at
 e-mail: asn1307@aol.com

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The Friends is the official museum support group for the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, a 64-mile-long operating railroad and museum of railroad history and technology between Antonito, Colorado, and Chama, New Mexico. The railroad is owned by Colorado and New Mexico and is operated by the Rio Grande Railway Preservation Corporation. As the museum support group, the Friends is dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of the railroad. The Friends is an Affiliate Member of ARM (Association of Railway Museums) and a Member of TRAIN (Tourist Railway Association).

Family membership in the Friends is \$25.00 per year; outside the USA membership is \$35.00. All contributions are fully tax deductible and will be gratefully accepted. Please write us in Albuquerque or call us at (505) 880-1311 for information about the Friends. The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad is both a National and a State Registered Historic Site.

Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad



Denver & Rio Grande Railway—1880 to 1886
 Denver & Rio Grande Railroad—1886 to 1921
 Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad—1921 to 1970
 Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad—1970 to 2003
 © 2003 FRIENDS OF THE CUMBRES & TOLTEC SCENIC RAILROAD, INC.

(continued from page 1)

Often cars were brought in needing new wheels. A brake shoe would lock, preventing a wheel from turning. Friction from passing along the track over a great distance produced sparks and ground a flat spot on the wheel. When the brake was released the flat spot pounded the rails as the wheel turned. A car with a flat wheel was brought in and jacked up with heavy manual ratchet jacks. When the trucks were rolled out the steam crane lifted the wheels away and brought back a new pair. The wheel spindles ran in journal boxes filled with a fabric waste that wicked lubricating oil between the polished wheel spindle and its bearing. This is where journal box fires started and they might not be detected. A hot-box could set the car on fire.

Jake, the head laborer, had a world-weary Teutonic aura, a face of gray stubble over wrinkled leather. The rumor was that he had lost a fortune in the '29 crash. He spoke little and few jokes were directed at him. To me he was distant, old-world, fatherly.

Sam, young Sam, was tall and awkward like a colt, dark and handsomely Italian. Newly married, he took a lot of ribbing from the men. Working with me as my senior, he assumed a heavy air of responsibility, explaining the obvious, but fortunately his solemnity quickly evaporated into highjinks. Sam regaled everyone we met with a patter of nonsense and plotted mischief. Anyone who casually laid his work gloves down might return to find them nailed to the floor of the boxcar.

Much of farm work is solitary, but in the yard, I learned that working together can bring an intimacy. As a group men can be petty, coarse, and profane, they can be dangerous, but more often they are generous and eager to help the young and pass on hard-won skills they possess. Most men entertain and confide personal dreams of something better.

When the noon whistle blew we assembled to eat our bag lunches in the locker room. I read pocket books that I found in the boxcars, usually westerns. Old Sam shuffled about keeping the office and locker room tidy, putting in time before retirement. A kindly Santa Claus with bushy white eyebrows he spoke with a soft Italian accent. He never ate lunch when we did for he was lonely and would rather talk. After I had been working for some months, he shuffled over and stood before me. There was a humorous light in his eye as he spoke portentously. "You know, Joe, he's always read the book. Someday he's gonna be a priest!" I joined in the rough laughter, but Sam's gentle observation made me aware of a barrier. I saw through their eyes that learning was a priesthood, perhaps unattainable.

The steam era was waning, though still evident. I experienced its full power when I stood on a steel bridge over a switching yard. Three steam locomotives approached and rumbled beneath me simultaneously. The proximity of weight and power was intimidating. The warm dense smoke from their stacks obscured my vibrating perch in an opalescent cloud. Sensations of heat, the smell of oil, the hiss of steam, the assault of a metallic clunking, grunting, and sucking were a living presence to elicit awe. But for all its power and bluster, when a steam engine leaves its track, its

power and bluster fades away. A system of highways, roads, and airports was in place to accommodate faster more flexible means of transportation.

The Korean War interrupted and ended my railway career.

After many years I returned to visit the cripple yard. The names and faces of the men remained so animate in my mind that I expected that I might see them as they were, frozen in my time. But they had their own dreams, their own time. I could only approximate where the yard had been in a descending curve, beneath the smooth black asphalt of the new Route 9 where it follows the broad Hudson River north.

Joseph Ferguson lives in Weston, Massachusetts. Edited and reprinted with the author's permission from *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 10, 1993.

NEWS FROM THE RAILROAD

Compiled from Friends of the C&TS News, a feature of the Friends' Web site—www.cumbrestoltec.org. Please refer to the Web site for more coverage of the events summarized here, as well as other news.

Railroad to Open June 14

General Manager Kim Smith Flowers has announced that opening day on the C&TS will be Saturday, June 14. Limited locomotive availability will necessitate a four train per week schedule, with a Chama to Antonito train Saturday and Tuesday, and an Antonito to Chama train Sunday and Wednesday. If you board the train in Chama, when you arrive in Antonito you will board a bus that will return you to Chama the same day. If you board the train in Antonito, when you arrive in Chama you will board a bus that will return you to Antonito the same day.

Tickets can be purchased over the secure Web site: www.cumbrestoltec.com, or by calling 1-888-CUMBRES (1-888-286-2737).

C&TS Receives New Mexico Funding

Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico signed several budget bills in March 2003 that will provide \$710,000 in operating revenue and an additional \$300,000 for capital expenses for the railroad. The governor and the state legislature provided this much needed support despite their knowledge that Colorado would be providing no funding this year because of budget restraints. The capital support includes \$120,000 for the Railroad Commission's share of the EDA locomotive grant for next year. The remaining \$180,000 was a reauthorization of New Mexico monies that was previously frozen pending a Colorado match. This action by the governor and the state legislature allows this money to be used despite no prospect of matching funds from Colorado

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Announces EDA Grant

At a press conference held in Santa Fe on April 29, Secretary of Commerce Don Evans announced the award of the Economic Development Administration locomotive grant to the railroad. The award involves \$1.5 million for the first year of what is hoped will be a three-year, \$3.3 million project, of which 80 percent will be funded by the EDA, with 10 percent matches each provided by the Friends and the Railroad Commission.

New Contract Signed by Commission and RGRPC

At its meeting in Antonito on May 3, 2003, the Railroad Commission gave final approval to the management contract with the Friends affiliate, the Rio Grande Railway Preservation Corporation.

At this May 3 meeting, the commission approved the hiring of Richard Gomez of Alamosa as its new executive director, replacing Bob Johnson who resigned in April. Mr. Gomez is an experienced and widely praised grant writer, having worked in this capacity for an area housing authority and more recently as a grant writer for the commission itself.

The commission elected officers for the coming fiscal year: Steven Malnar, Chair; Wayne Quinlan, Vice Chair; Carl Turner, Secretary; and Carol Salisbury, Treasurer.

Something Old—Something New

by Spencer Wilson

Something old are all the C&TS Dispatches dating back to 1988, and Something New is the complete collection of Dispatch issues on CD! Yes, through the miracle of modern technology and the expertise of Friend Shawn Dickman, the Dispatches from 1988 (our first year of publication) through 2002 can now be purchased from the Friends' office in Albuquerque.

This is a project long desired by Dispatch editor Art Nichols. We did look into reprinting all of them, but the expense was just too much. So, we discussed converting them into digital format on to floppy or compact disk. And we considered doing only the first ten years. Then along came our Friend Shawn Dickman, qualified with computer degree and experience, possessing both the means and expertise to get it done. He pointed out that digitizing ten years of Dispatch publications would not fit on a floppy, while putting ten years on CD was a waste of most of the space on a CD. He suggested that we digitize the rest of the Dispatches through 2002. And so, the plan was put into effect.

I scanned the Dispatches into the computer one page at a time. Shawn then worked his magic in collecting, collating, indexing, and setting up the system using Adobe Acrobat. We bought the correct equipment and then he burned the Dispatches on to the proper kind of CD.

The 1988 through 2002 issues are now available from the Friends office (6005 Osuna Rd, NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109) for \$15.00, including mailing and handling. Checks should be made out to Friends of the C&TS. Telephone orders may be placed by calling the Friends at (505) 880-1311.

2004 Schedule of Friends' Events

Volunteer Work Sessions

May 10–14, Session A

May 17–21, Session B

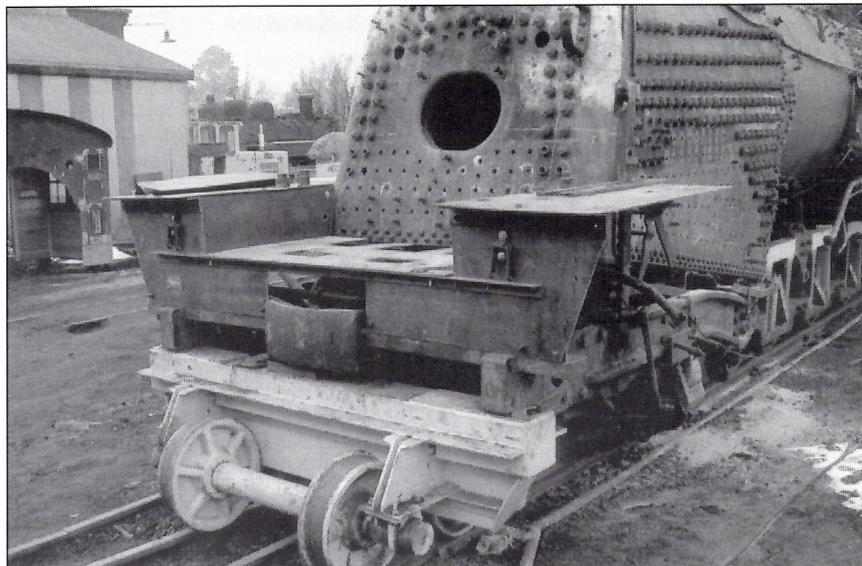
June 14–18, Session C

June 18, Annual Meeting

June 21–25, Session D

August 2–6, Session E

August 9–13, Session F



Locomotive 484 and the new cab floor built by the engine house crew, March 2003. In the background are 484's cab rebuilt by the volunteers, the Rogers hydromotive gasoline locomotive purchased at the Sundown and Southern auction in July 2002, and locomotive 489. (Photo by Tom Cardin.)



**Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec
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